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ABSTRACT

This study investigated differences in perceived quality of life of 156 college students and 77 faculty members at the same university. It also addressed the issue of sex differences. Subjects responded to an 81-item quality-of-life survey by indicating their degree of dissatisfaction with each situation. Students differed significantly from faculty in that they expressed more dissatisfaction. The faculty focused less on those sources of dissatisfaction that might be characterized as concrete-personal and abstract-personal events. Although there were few sex differences for the faculty, female students reported a significantly poorer quality of life than male students. (Author)

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Perception of Quality of Life of College Students and Their Faculty

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Running head: Perception of Quality of Life

Perception of Quality of Life of College Students and Their Faculty

While "quality of life" may be viewed from many different perspectives, it is obvious that people do indeed make evaluative judgments concerning their personal lives and make important decisions relevant to their careers, marriages, places of residence, political affiliations, etc. based on such evaluations regardless of the specific standards they use in making these appraisals. Moreover, the concept of quality of life seems to be getting increasing attention as many more people can afford to turn away from considerations of simple personal survival or subsistence in the face of a harshly demanding environment and focus more on various self-actualizing life styles. It is also understandable that as societal conditions change from those that so often permanently established rigid roles in life at the time of birth to those that enable the individual to more often pursue diverse lines of personal choice and self-determination there would be increased consideration of the quality of life.

Recent research has dealt with the effects of educational attainment on subjectively evaluated quality of life (Withey, 1975), on group differences in quality of life (Klassen, Roth, & Hornstra, 1974), on correlates of life satisfaction (Edwards & Klemmack, 1973), and on developing a methodology for the assessment

and quantification of the quality of life (House, Livingston, & Swinburn, 1975). In addition, research suggests that physical and mental disorders may be related to the occurrence of undesirable life events (e.g. Myers, Lindenthal, & Pepper, 1971; Rahe, McKean, & Arthur, 1967; Wyler, Masuda, & Holmes, 1971).

Although it has been reported that Americans generally express higher levels of satisfaction with their quality of life than people in developing nations ("Americans Among Most," 1976), many Americans, i.e., 44%, also seem to perceive the quality of life as having declined in recent years ("Harris Survey," 1976). If this deteriorative trend were to continue, it is quite possible that Americans may eventually perceive their quality of life as not much better than that of citizens of the developing countries.

College students and university professors probably represent particularly interesting contrasting groups relative to the American scene.

The former group represents a new generation, including the country's future leaders, that is attempting to reconcile transmitted cultural values with their contemporary personal experiences. The latter group represents an older generation that has achieved at least considerable societal recognition and respect, and is more closely associated with the present intellectual leadership.

Given this background, the present study addressed two basic questions, namely: (1) Are there major differences in the perceived quality of life of college students and their faculty? (2) Are there sex differences in the perceived quality of life in each of these groups?

Method

Subjects

There were 156 volunteer undergraduate students, 93 female and 63 male, with a mean age of 20.27 (*SD* = 2.09) years. Ninety-seven percent of the students were white. The class distribution was 43% seniors, 29% juniors, 26% sophomores, and 2% freshmen.

The faculty respondents, derived from the same University, consisted of 62 males and 15 females, with mean ages of 44.10 (*SD* = 9.05) and 42.87 (*SD* = 10.23) years, respectively.

Procedure

Based on the literature, on the conceptualization of the problem, and on pre-testing, a Quality of Life Survey form consisting of 81 items was developed. Each item refers to a situation that could possibly be upsetting to an individual. Respondents were requested to indicate on a 4-point scale the degree of distress experienced in relation to each event.

The items had previously been categorized by five raters making independent judgments as falling within the following four logically meaningful categories: (a) Concrete Personal

(26 items), (b) Abstract Personal (13 items), (c) Concrete Environmental (24 items), and (d) Abstract Environmental (18 items). On 36 of the 81 items there was complete agreement by the five raters and on 26 additional items 80% of the raters agreed. The remaining 19 items disclosed majority agreement. The individuals performing the ratings encompassed a wide range of professional experience.

The college students were administered the Survey in groups; the faculty, individually. Of 211 faculty forms distributed, a 37% return rate was achieved in time for inclusion.

Results

Sex Differences

Responses falling into categories "no" and "slight" were collapsed as were those falling into the categories of "very" and "extreme"; all statistical analyses were based on this dichotomous classification system.

While there were virtually no sex differences for the faculty since only two chi-squares out of 81 comparisons were significant, a substantial number (27%) of items differentiated the male from the female students. Of these, almost all (86%) revealed the male students to be significantly less distressed by potentially frustrating events than the female students. The only exceptions that disclosed relatively greater male distress were the items: "Not having sex often enough," Big business too controlling," and "Housekeeping chores."

When the sex differences for the college sample were examined for each of the four major conceptual areas separately, it was found that in each category there was a significant ($p < .01$) sex difference, with women displaying relatively greater degrees of dissatisfaction than men.

Table 1 displays the situations that were most often disconcerting to male and female college students. For each sex, the five items most frequently endorsed as most distressing are presented along with the frequency of selection by the other sex.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Table 2 offers the same information for the least distressing situations.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Students of both sexes selected in common "Death of a loved one," "Illness or accident of a family member or a loved one," "Disappointed in friendship or love affair," and "Being cut off from others" among the most disturbing events in life. Female students often stressed difficulties in communication and the crime rate whereas male students more often perceived a threat to health as being extremely upsetting.

There was not so much overlap between the sexes in identifying areas of least concern. Both male and female students agreed that the problem of overcrowding at home, the power of labor unions, and problems with neighbors least often upset them. Male students were least distressed by changing conditions and female students professed to be least distressed by household chores.

For both sexes there were significant differences in reaction to the four conceptual categories (men: χ^2 (3) = 31.38, $p < .001$; women: χ^2 (3) = 36.70, $p < .001$); sexes combined: χ^2 (3) = 65.20, $p < .001$). The "concrete-personal" items lead to greater, and the "abstract-personal" items, to lower levels of distress in these students.

Faculty Response Profile

Table 3 lists the most distressing situations as identified by the faculty of either sex.

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Insert Table 3 about here

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Table 4 presents the least distressing situations as identified by the faculty of either sex.

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Faculty-Student Differences

There were significant differences ($p < .05$) between female faculty and female students on 18 of the 81 (22%) items. Without

exception, all of the differentiating situations revealed women students to be relatively more concerned about the quality of life than women faculty.

Similar comparisons between male faculty and male students disclosed significant differences ($p < .05$) on 34 of the 81 (42%) items. In all but four of these differentiating situations, i.e., in 88%, the male students were relatively more disturbed by the quality of life than their male professors.

A series of 2 x 2 chi-square analyses comparing the two groups on each of the conceptually identified clusterings of items, done separately for each sex, showed that the male faculty differed significantly from male students in concrete-personal (χ^2 (1) = 244.76, $p < .001$) and abstract-personal (χ^2 (1) = 60.54, $p < .001$) categories, and that female faculty differed significantly from female stduents in all categories (χ^2 (1) = 120.14, 29.21, 5.70, and 8.13, respectively, all $p < .05$). Especially noteworthy is the faculty's placing significantly less stress as compared to students on concrete-personal and abstract-personal events as sources of dissatisfaction.

Discussion

Regarding sex differences, the results indicate that there were no substantial sex differences in perceived quality of life for university professors at the institution from which this sample was drawn. It would seem reasonable, therefore, to conclude that these men and women share a common orientation in

their assessment of the quality of life, one which is more determined by their position in the societal hierarchy than by their gender. However, there were major sex differences in college students enrolled in the same university, with female students reacting to a greater number of situations with higher levels of personal distress than did their male counterparts. Whether the quality of life is objectively poorer for female students than for male students, or whether possibly women's greater sensitivity to a host of problems in living accounted for their differential reactions is not known. The results do suggest, however, that college women subjectively experience less satisfaction than college men in a wide range of life areas.

The most salient finding regarding faculty-student differences in quality of life, when sex is kept constant, indicates that students report more dissatisfaction generally than the faculty, but especially in concrete-personal and abstract-personal areas. These variations in satisfaction levels could possibly be attributed to students' occupying a more marginal role in society relative to adults, with considerable insight on their part about this marginality, or, alternatively, to the students being at a more self-oriented and dependent developmental stage than the comparison group of faculty. Consistent with the latter explanation is the research by Tolor, Kelly, and Stebbins (1976) showing college students to behave less altruistically

than even emotionally disturbed adults.

The profile of most distressing aspects of life as identified by students primarily discloses concern with loss of emotional support and sustenance, distress about possible social isolation and interference with ongoing interpersonal relationships, and some distress at the prospect of loss of vigor and health, especially in males. These students profess, for the most part, to have great tolerance for change, particularly the men, to accept a variety of interpersonal relationships, and to be unaffected by the alleged excessive controls exerted by labor unions.

On the other hand, the faculty members are more distressed by the incidence and effects of crime, by the misuse of natural resources, by certain aspects of the prevailing political system, and by inadequacies as perceived in the present educational, health and social service institutions. They appear to be relatively more content with their families, their roles as mentors and as people upon whom others rely, with their high activity level, with the challenges of rapid changes and varied demands, with their educational achievements, and even with the household chores to which they minister.

The picture that emerges for the faculty is one of an experience of great competence in their personal lives but a sense of profound regret concerning some of the trends discerned in the broader society. In contrast, college students express

a sense of personal uncertainty about obtaining emotional support and achieving a feeling of relatedness to others, and considerably less disenchantment with the broader societal scene.

Limitations of this study, relating to the fact that subjects were volunteers, that the research was done at one university, that the measure's test-retest reliability is unknown, and that social desirability sets may play some role, are acknowledged.

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Table 1

Situations That Were Most Frequently Regarded as Highly Distressing by Either Male or Female College Students

Items	Sex			
	Males		Females	
	%	Rank	%	Rank
Death of a loved one	84	1	92	1
Illness or accident of a family member or a loved one	78	2	91	2
Not being as healthy as I would like to be	68	3	58	
Being cut off from others	65	4.5	76	5
Disappointed in a friendship or love affair	65	4.5	82	3
People not communicating with each other enough	51		76	5
Too much crime	64		76	5

Table 2

Situations That Were Most Frequently Regarded as Minimally Distressing by Either Male or Female College Students

Items	Sex			
	Males		Females	
	%	Rank	%	Rank
Too much change	97	1		
Relatives hard to take	92	4		
Too many people at home	92	4	94	2
Labor unions too controlling	92	4	84	5
Too much emphasis on sex	92	4		
Neighbors not likeable	92	4	86	4
People depend too much on me	89		90	3
Housekeeping chores	84		97	1

Table 3

Situations Most Often Perceived to be Most Distressing by Male or Female Faculty[a]

Items	Sex	
	Male (%)	Female (%)
Too much crime	69	87
Waste of our natural resources	60	67
Schools not teaching well	59	60
Health care services are too expensive or not easily available	55	(40)
Lack of facility for the elderly	(41)	66
Things that are bought are poorly made	50	(40)
The streets are not safe anymore	50	(47)
Dishonest politicians	50	53
Women put down	(28)	53

[a]Only those items are listed regarding which at least 50% of either male or female faculty expressed agreement as being distressing. The percentages in parentheses refer to values below this criterion for the second group whenever only one group achieved the criterion.

Table 4

Situations Most Often Perceived as Non-Stressful by Male and Female Faculty[a]

Items	Sex	
	Male (%)	Female (%)
Too many people at home	97	100
People depend too much on me	96	(87)
Neighbors not likeable	95	93
Nothing much to do	95	(87)
Too much change	93	100
Not being able to move	(85)	100
Upset with how children act	(76)	100
They expect too much from me at work	92	93
Who I am	(84)	94
Having to meet deadlines	(84)	94
Not being able to have a child	92	93
Not having as much education as I would like	90	93
Not having sex often enough	(83)	93
Having to move	90	94
House in need of repair	(89)	93
Housekeeping chores	93	93
Too much emphasis on sex	90	(86)
The hectic pace of life	90	93

[a]Only those items are listed regarding which at least 90% of either male or female faculty expressed agreement as being non-distressing. The percentages in parentheses refer to values below this criterion for the second group whenever only one group achieved the criterion.

Footnotes

Appreciation is extended to Charles A. Stebbins for his assistance in the data collection and analysis. Gratitude is also expressed to the above and to Mary C. Brown, Teresa Delco, and Belle Tolor for serving as raters.

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